

Buddha and “Allah”

by Piya Tan

The Straits Times (Fri 28/12/07, p26) carries an interesting article by Farish A Noor entitled "The origins of the word ‘Allah’." He writes that the word Allah is pre-Islamic (like "Brahma" in the Buddha's time), and is even today used for "God" by all Arabic speaking communities, whether Catholics, Copts, or Muslim. It is only in Malaysia that the word is proscribed, that is, "only Muslims can use the word 'Allah' for God."

Page 17 of the same paper carries the report, “Churches turn to courts over use of ‘Allah’.” The Sabah Evangelical Church has sued the government for banning the import of Christian books containing the word "Allah."

I will briefly try to explain here why I think this ban occurs only in Malaysia, even though the word "Allah" simply translates "God." (That is, I will not comment on the historical reasons given by Farish.) Although I agree with Farish that there should be no ban on religious words, I strongly think that the Christian leaders and evangelists are themselves at fault.

Non-Muslim Malaysians have been unwelcomely approached by evangelists even since Portuguese times. Not only do people feel belittled by the evangelists, but many families are broken up as a result of such evangelism. In fact, the evangelism is so aggressive that the unthinking public often enough unconsciously become victims of the Stockholm Syndrome, when they actually begin to sympathize with these evangelists.

Occasionally, the Christians even try to convert the Muslims. Understandably, the Muslim administrators of Malaysia are making efforts to make sure that the Christians do not have the tools of conversion—religious terms--which make it easier for the Muslims to become Christian.

A similar situation occurred in China recently, when the Chinese government made a law that all Tibetan "incarnations" need to be licensed by the state. See:

http://rawstory.com/news/afp/China_tells_Tibet_s_living_Buddhas_08032007.html

This is a brilliant political countermove on the Tibetan notion of tulku or incarnation, which started around the 21th century. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulku>

Group karma seems to be at work here. As to further significance, I leave the wise reader to reflect on, especially with regards to the purpose of the Dharma as intended by the Buddha.

A broad hint of how we can truly benefit from the Dharma, join us in the study of this inspiring text: **[Samana-m-acala Sutta 1](#)** (A 4.87) [Four kinds of true saints]

To download the Sutta, click here:

http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com/A4.87_Samanamacala_S1_sd20.13.pdf

or go to <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

Then go to "Anguttara Page" and click on the Sutta.

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